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## Glen Ellyn girl self-publishes book inspired by ancient burial grounds

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By MATT LA LUZ - [mlaluz@shawmedia.com](mailto:mlaluz@shawmedia.com)

**GLEN ELLYN** – When it comes to writing, authors find inspiration from a variety of sources: an old house, a piece of music or even their dreams.

Incoming Glenbard West High School freshman Nicole Kaiser's inspiration comes from the woods.

Nicole, 14, specifically drew from the burial grounds tucked away in the ancient woodland sandwiched between the Black River and the

**(Photo provided)**

shores of Lake Michigan at the Sheboygan Indian Mound Park in Wisconsin.

This spiritual destination serves as a vacation spot for Nicole and her family. Much of her childhood was spent at their cottage in the small town of Wilson, Wis.

Nicole took her inspiration and decided to write, illustrate and self-publish her first book, "The Greatest Legend of the Black River Forest."

"I created the whole story as I went along. It's easy for me to just improvise," she said.

Nicole was influenced by the tales of the native effigy mound people, who populated the area from about 500 to 1000 A.D., according to an informational section in her book. The mound people revered sacred burial mounds in the shapes of birds, reptiles and other animals, which housed loved ones and objects.

Her story centers on a journey made by two characters, Red the fox and Chick the owl, as they set off to find magical stag antlers atop a burial mound. The antlers contain powers that can turn an animal into a human.

Along the way, both Red and Chick run into predators and must also deal with a crooked mayor who steals a diamond from a sacred mound, creating chaos and disrupting nature.

"The moral is just kind of to appreciate nature and every small thing. You should appreciate the way you are and not get greedy," Nicole said.

The book stemmed from a year-long literacy class assignment courtesy of Hadley Junior High School teacher Brett Cooper, one of the people to whom the book is dedicated.

Cooper was pivotal in helping Nicole with the story and editing the book. He said he recognized her creativity and knack for storytelling and encouraged her to write.

"She's super thoughtful and observant and whimsical and also very intelligent and motivated," he said.

Nicole's father, Tom Kaiser, was also happy she was able to use her creativity to make something special.

"She's a good kid and she's had a lot of people along the way help her," Tom said. "It's been a positive experience for her."

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